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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH AL-IRAQIYYA LEADER AYAD
ALLAWI

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In a July 13 lunch hosted by Ambassador Crocker, al-Iraqiyya bloc leader and former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi told Ambassador Crocker that he was not against an SFA/SOFA with the United States in principle, but that he and other parliamentary bloc leaders wanted more clarity from the Maliki government on the parameters of such an agreement, more specifically, the nature of the threats the agreement was meant to confront. That said, Allawi passed on the suggestion that he make a statement that he supported in principle a long-term security agreement between Iraq and the U.S. Ducking also the question as to whether al-Iraqiyya has joined the National Salvation Front, a new coalition of blocs being organized by former PM Ibrahim al-Jaffari, he declared that Iraqiyya, Hiwaar, Fadhilah, elements of Dawa, and some Sadrists all share the same goals in the parliament, that of ensuring that a long-term arrangement with the U.S. will prevent Iran from developing undue influence in Iraq. Outside of the parliament, he said, al-Iraqiyya was forming cooperative relations with groups that included the Sahwa, some unions, associations, and even members of the Tawafuq bloc to contest the upcoming provincial elections. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Ambassador was joined by S/I David Satterfield, NSC Senior Director Brett McGurk, and PolCouns Matt Tueller. Ayad Allawi was accompanied by his cousin, former Minister of Communications Mohammed Allawi.

In Principle We Are Not Against...

13. (C) In a July 13 lunch that he hosted, Ambassador Crocker asked Iraqiyya bloc leader and former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi whether al-Iraqiyya has joined the National Salvation Front, a coalition of parliamentary groups being organized by former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaffari to oppose the Maliki government. Allawi responded that Iraqiyya was engaged in doing two things simultaneously: it was forming a coordinating group of like-minded parties within the parliament to ensure the unity of Iraq and it was forming partnerships outside of parliament to contest the upcoming provincial elections. In Parliament, Allawi said, Fadhilah, Hiwaar and some Sadrists all share the same views with al-Iraqiyya on how to keep the country unified, but that it was "nothing called 'jabha' or 'Salvation Front' -- nothing of that nature." As to al-Iraqiyya's alliances outside of the Parliament, Allawi said that his party was looking to develop partnerships to contest the provincial elections. Those possible partnerships would include: the Sahwa, unions, social associations, professors, and some members of the Tawafuq coalition -- a pan Arab group.

14. (C) Clarifying his position on SFA/SOFA, Allawi said that Iraq has been mismanaged. He said that to ensure the unity of the country, it was important to identify the threat to that unity, which was definitely Iran and pro-Iranian forces in Iraq. Thus he personally saw the purpose of such an agreement as a means of preventing Iran from taking over.

Yet, he said, the Maliki government has failed to clarify the nature of the threat for which such an agreement is necessary. The Foreign Minister's briefing to Parliament had been no more than coffee shop generalities. What is wanted, he said, are the details of the agreement, which the government should provide at least to bloc leaders if not to the entire parliament. Allawi said he did not think in principle that people would oppose the agreements, only that they needed to know why such agreements are needed.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Crocker and NSC Senior Director McGurk noted that Allawi professed to support the agreement in principle, his reservations having to do with the government's failure to clarify the details of the agreements. Yet the media has been reporting that Allawi is against the agreement. For that very reason, it would be helpful if Allawi were to say that he supported the agreement in principle or at least that the agreement was a good thing for Iraq and that he hoped it would be a success. Allawi ducked the suggestion. He said that his words had been "In principle we are not against" the agreement because such agreements were normal occurrences in bilateral relations. That said, he could not say he supported it because he did not know the details, that he has heard only contradictory statements from the government: first that there needs to be a timeline for withdrawal, then that the agreements are being considered. The government needs to provide clarity, he said.

¶6. (C) PolCouns Tueller reminded Allawi that the Sadrists do say explicitly that they are against the agreement and that Allawi is being grouped with those that are against an

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agreement with the U.S. Allawi, trying to deflect the assertion, said that Ibrahim Jaffari, Fadhilah, Hiwaar and the Sadrists had all wanted to hold a press conference in his home to announce the formation of a coalition, but that he had refused because he wanted to hear first from the government. Allawi continued that he trusted neither the Dawa party nor the Sadrists, though a few were reasonable, and that he did not like the JAM at all.

¶7. (C) Allawi said that Iraq needed the presence of the U.S. armed forces. CNN had reported that only 10 percent of the Iraqi armed forces were ready. Ambassador said that the mathematical formula by which we evaluate operational readiness, good as it is, may not be the best indicator of the Iraqi situation. A better measurement of the readiness of the Iraqi forces would be whether Iraqi battalions are in the lead in their area of operations. Of the 153 battalions, 114 of them (75 percent) are in the lead. Allawi said that the government should be providing clarifications such as the one provided by the Ambassador and it has failed to do so. Nevertheless, Iraq needed the presence of the U.S. armed forces, because the Iraqi forces are not yet ready. Allawi continued that even if we cannot set dates but must set goals, as the U.S. builds Iraq's capability, it can draw down forces. Ambassador Crocker said that we all agree that even with the departure of the surge forces there is still a role for the U.S. to play in Iraq. But if U.S. forces are to remain beyond December 31, there must be a legal basis -- we cannot do it on a handshake. Ambassador said that politics are at play on both sides in this election year, but political debates should not get in the way of long-term security interests and we hope that those in Iraq who seek common interests take that into account.

Provincial Elections, Regional Progress, Lebanon

¶7. (C) Ambassador Crocker noted that Allawi had cited a united Iraq as being the basis for his participation in a new parliamentary coalition and yet the Fadhilah bloc wants Basra to be a separate region. Allawi said that he had been approached by Basra Governor Mohammed al-Waili two days ago

about the issue. Allawi said that the al-Iraqiyya position was that it is too early for that because the country is still too open to Iranian interference. Once Iraq is unified, Allawi said, separate regions can be discussed.

18. (C) In response to Ambassador Crocker and S/I Satterfield's invitation to discuss al-Iraqiyya's plans for the provincial elections, Allawi said that he would be approaching the United Nations in New York and Amr Moussa of the Arab League for their involvement. He said he did not think there was fairness in the government's handling of elections and that 120 legislators had just signed a paper calling for fair elections. On al-Iraqiyya strategy, he said that his bloc would try to form local partnership in each province. Basra, Kirkuk, Anbar and Maysan, he said, were the most important governorates for al-Iraqiyya and it was in those areas where there had to be fair elections. Mosul, Kirkuk and Diyala have unique structures and Iran would try its best to influence those elections. The elections in Basra would be more important than those in Baghdad, he said.

Allawi said he did not know what the Sadrists planned to do.

S/I Satterfield said that although there will be no list, voters will know who the Sadrists are. Tueller added that some Sadrists will run as independents. Allawi said that there are some good Sadrists, such as Shaykh Salah al-Obeidi, who are interested in talking to the U.S. Ambassador Crocker noted the irony of a movement that began with the purpose of asserting Iraqi Arab identity is being led by someone living in Iran and that it is involved in sectarian violence.

19. (C) S/I Satterfield noted that we are pleased with Iraq's progress in developing its relations with countries in the region and invited Allawi's views on the subject. Allawi said the recent visit of the Turkish Prime Minister and the posting of ambassadors from Jordan, the UAE and Bahrain were important and that the GOI should capitalize on the opportunity and reciprocate to show Arabs that it is working not only with Iran. But, Allawi said, the GOI's successes are based not what it has done, but what the U.S. has done. Arab countries are beginning to believe that Iraq is moving away from Iran.

110. (C) On Lebanon, Allawi said he had hopes for the new Sleiman government. He said he had been invited to attend the wedding of Nabih Berri's daughter and had taken the opportunity to hold meetings with Fouad Siniora and Michel Sleiman. He said he also had a good meeting with the Amal members of the Lebanese Parliament. The discussions were on Iran's influence on Lebanon and Iraq. His Lebanese

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interlocutors believed that this chapter of Lebanese politics was won by the Syrians and the Iranians and that Hizbollah was gaining confidence by the day. Allawi said that Nabih Berri was "a good guy," who Allawi had encouraged to open up to and to trust Saad Hariri. Iran is not about to let go in Lebanon. It wants more and unless there is a coherent Arab strategy, it will be difficult to confront Iranian ambitions, Allawi concluded.

CROCKER